

# **The border and oil war ...**

## **improving the conditions of negotiations between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis**



**Case Analysis**

**Political Analysis Unit**

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## Preface

When the Saudi-led Arab coalition began intervention in Yemen in supporting the internationally recognized government in March 2015, Saudi diplomats and officials made promises to the kingdom's Western allies to bring the Houthis to the negotiating table with the legitimate government within few weeks in accordance with the conditions of the legitimate government. At that time, military experts and followers feared that the kingdom would drown in the Yemen war and that war would last for years, since declaring the end of war is more difficult than declaring the beginning, so it is not expected when the war will come to end. With an incomplete strategy, based on a set of tactics and many concerns, Saudi Arabia will enter the sixth year of war in Yemen.

The recent developments between (January 2020 and February, 2020), the Houthis' progress in eastern Sana'a and trying to reach the center of Ma'rib and al-Jawf governorates in light of the division within the coalition camp, reveal one of the results of the war prolong, and that the country may return to pro-war situation. It is clear that the Houthis are seeking to restore the military map of January 2015, months after they took control of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, and most of northern governorates, in preparation for responding to calls and demands from the United Nations to enter into comprehensive consultations to end the war in the country.

The assessment of the state of war and peace in Yemen at the beginning of 2020 will address: lines of war between the Houthis and the internationally recognized government, divisions in the government and the Arab coalition's camp, and international calls for consultations after the failure of the Stockholm Agreement, in addition to the current back consultations in Muscat between Saudi Arabia and the Houthis.

## New war lines:

The year 2019 witnessed very important changes, including the Emirates announcement to leave the war in Yemen, Saudi taking over the headquarters of the coalition administration in the city of Aden, the country's interim capital, and the Deputy Minister of Defense Prince Khalid bin Salman (brother of the Crown Prince) received the Yemeni file. The kingdom began consultations with the Houthis after targeting vital Saudi oil facilities, which led to a temporary halt of half of Saudi Arabia's oil exports.

The lines of confrontations have remained the same since 2018, without any important progress. By the beginning of 2020, the Houthis began launching major attacks against government forces, making progress in Nehm district, east of Sana'a, and advancing towards the center of Ma'rib and al-Jawf governorates, the center of tribal depth in support of the internationally recognized government. But this was ultimately the result of a change in the coalition's and government's strategy for the war as follows:

- **Ceasefire in fighting fronts:** after the "Stockholm Agreement" between the Houthis and the legitimate government was announced at the end of (2018), all efforts to liberate Hodeidah governorate (western Yemen), which is a vital region for the strategy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, stopped. Under the Hodeidah Agreement, that is included in the Stockholm agreement, the fragile ceasefire continued throughout 2019, without any movement to implement the remaining provisions of the agreement. The ceasefire was under the supervision of the United Nations Mission in Support of the Hodeidah Agreement [UNMHA], which began operating in January 2019, and its mandate was renewed for further six months on January 13, 2020. Within one year, the mission was headed by three UN staff. The mission did not make any progress in monitoring the ceasefire until October 2019, after the establishment of five centers through which it is easy to transport goods between the port and the roads leading to the interior and exterior areas. But no progress was made on "the forces redeployment" and "handing over the three ports (Hodeidah, Ras Issa, Al-Salif) to a local security force, and managing the port revenues.

"Although the United Nations speaks of progress in the agreement a year after its signing, the Stockholm Agreement is made of only three cards, and any progress, if any, can be observed. The formula, in which the agreement was written, allows, of course, each party to interpret the situation as it wants, and this is what happened.

- **Air strikes decreased:** the rate of air attacks decreased during the year 2019. The decline continued with the start of Saudi consultations with the Houthis in September 2019 until the end of the year. As the figures show: the total number of air strikes is (1181) in one year, so the monthly average is supposed to be 99 air strikes. But in the last three months of 2019, the air strikes have actually decreased to (80) in October, (39) in November, and (18) in December.
- **Attack on the reception camp in Marib:** A government forces camp in the Marib governorate was hit on January 19, 2020 and 86 soldiers were killed, no one has claimed responsibility for this attack, but the government has accused the Houthis, who denied their responsibility. The accusation of any other party seemed to put the Saudi-led coalition at risk and a very difficult situation, as the "reception camp" was the headquarters of new recruits within the Fourth Brigade of Presidential Protection Forces that fought the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council in Aden<sup>[1]</sup> several times before it was removed in August 2019.

Researchers at the Abaad Center for Studies and Research have obtained special information about the missile that targeted the reception camp in Marib, "which shows that it is a ballistic missile with a range between (110 to 150 km) of a length of no less than four meters and a diameter (30 cm) at a speed of 2.3 (Mach), and with an explosive load not less than 200 kg, it has a control system for hitting the target, and it is similar to the Houthi type (Badr-F) missiles, which is still somewhat primitive, being without a fragmented head where the fragments were placed in the head in the form of iron cubes, and it appears that it was not made locally as the Houthis claim. It entered as pieces and was launched from a ground platform." Abaad information indicates that the missile control system was destroyed in the explosion, so it was difficult to obtain clear evidence about the source of the missile industry, but the Houthis are demonstrating their ability to produce generations of this type.<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Attack on Nehm front and Al-Jawf

- **Controlling Sites in Nehm:** Amid the controversy after the missile attack on the reception camp in Marib, the Houthis launched a military attack on the "Nehm" area, east of the capital, Sana'a. Ten days after the attack, the Houthis announced, "The government forces were expelled from Nehm, east of Sanaa, which consisted of 17 military brigades and 20 battalions, and their equipment were completely seized."<sup>[3]</sup> The Houthi group's plan was to surround "Nehm" and strangle it and force the government forces there to surrender by launching the offensive, at the beginning of confrontations, from the right side, specifically on the area that links the sixth region (Al-Jawf) with the seventh region (Nehm), so that it could reach Al-Jawf through the area of "Magzar" in Al-Jawf. The Houthis intensified their attacks from the left side as well, especially on Huraib al-Qaramish area that links the third military region with the seventh region. The Houthis wanted to control Marib-Nehm-al-Jawf highway, but their attacks were strongly broken in both the right and the left sides. But then they intensified their attacks on "Al-Manara Mountain and Al-Munsaa" in the left side, so that they were able to advance in "Al-Munsaa" after government forces in that area received orders on their radios to gradually withdraw, and when it was discovered that their communication channel had been breached, the Houthis had already reached the strategic al-Jawf Intersection."<sup>[4]</sup>

- **Controlling al-Jawf Intersection:** The Houthis took control of the "Al-Jawf Intersection", which links al-Jawf governorate with Marib and Sana'a. The "Al-Jawf Intersection" is located at the bottom of a mountainous area. After the Houthis took control of these mountains, large areas became exposed to their fire, and the National Army was forced to withdraw to a safe distance. The Al-Jawf Intersection is important because any party controls it can control the main road between Marib and Al-Jawf. There are desert roads between the two governorates, but they cannot be used by cars. After the Houthis took control of a strategic area in Nehm and their arrival in Al-Jawf Intersection, the remaining areas towards Marib and Al-Jawf governorates became flat terrain, with no rugged mountainous areas, giving priority in the battlefield to those who control them.
- **Controlling Al-Hazm, capital of Al-Jawf:** Early March 2020, the Houthis took control of Al-Jawf governorate's center, Al-Hazm district, after the group took control of the "Al-Ghail" district, a stronghold of the group's intellectuals.<sup>[5]</sup> It seems that "most of Al-Jawf governorate became under the control of the Houthis."<sup>[6]</sup> The Houthi control over Al-Hazm opens the way towards the neighboring governorate of Marib, the last stronghold of the legitimate government in the east of the country, where the Houthis overlook Marib from three sides (east from Nehm, south from Serwah and north from Al-Jawf). And thus their path may begin to cordon off the city of Marib, if the legitimate government cannot respond to the attack. If the Houthis impose their full influence on the "Khob and Al Sha`f" directorate, adjacent to "Al-Hazm, this will open the group's path towards Hadramout Valley, the largest province in Yemen, which contains oil reserves such as Al-Jawf and Marib.

The Houthis' control of Al-Jawf also gives them new borders with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as Al-Jawf borders Saudi "Najran" (Al-Hazm city is 150 km from the Saudi border).

Through the national security accounts of Saudi Arabia, the Houthis' control of Al-Jawf may not be prolonged, and the battles may return as they were to the mountainous borders of Sana'a, since Al-Jawf is an open area so that it is easy for air force to resolve the battles in it. What might bring back to memory the photos of the Houthi group's camps, which carried out maneuvers and parade with weapons on the Saudi border after the fall of the capital, Sana'a, and just before the start of the Decisive Storm.

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## Factors helped Houthis progress and control:

- The breakdown of government forces in Nohm and Al-Jawf battles was a natural result of the absence of confidence between the coalition and the government in military aspect. Some sources pointed to dissatisfaction of the commander of the joint forces, commander of the Saudi ground forces, Prince Fahd bin Turki with the performance of the Minister of Defense, Lt. Gen. Mohamed al-Maqdashi, and complaints that Vice President Lt. Gen Ali Mohsen Saleh issued unilateral orders to the fighting fronts to move, so President Hadi issued a decision considering directives from Prince Fahd as directives from the president in May 2018.<sup>[7]</sup> The decision was proved to be useless and it led to conflicts within the army units. It was also used to settle personal accounts and achieve interests that are unrelated to the war with the Houthis.

- In addition to the Yemeni Staff, there are joint operations,<sup>[8]</sup> led by Major General Saghir bin Aziz, and there is usually a conflict of military orders between the two bodies. Military leaders have spoken of multiple loyalties because of these two bodies. The appointment of Saghir bin Aziz as Chief of General Staff at the end of February 2020 appears to be an attempt by the Yemeni government to solve the problem.
- The attack by the Emirates Air Force on the doors of Aden in August was a severe blow to the army, and it reinforced the prevailing belief that the interests of the coalition (Saudi Arabia and the Emirates) have nothing to do with helping the legitimacy to end the Houthi coup as specified in the official president's request to the Arab coalition. This was reflected negatively on the military field.
- The war has turned into a source of corruption by the coalition leaders and leaders in the Yemeni army. Although the army suffers from qualitative lack of armaments, some sources in the coalition confirm the payment of 10 million dollars per month for armaments,<sup>[9]</sup> but the reality is that the Ministry of Defense's stores are almost empty.
- The government's failure to restore communications from the control of the Houthi group or to establish parallel and independent communications, which made everything under their control, in addition to the fact that communications are a great financial source for the Houthi group in financing the war.
- The Yemeni army fights with rudimentary weapons while the Houthi group now has specific weapons and it uses heavy firepower in battles. The coalition refuses to provide its partners with qualitative weapons.<sup>[10]</sup>
- Financial and administrative corruption in the government and the army, as the number of forces in the Nehm front considerably decreased to less than (25%) of the specified number of forces because most of soldiers and officers in the fighting fronts did not receive their salaries for many months, which ultimately led them to leave the camps to search for other ways to get money for living.<sup>[11]</sup> The Saudi-led fronts on borders get high regular salaries.

- The lack of coordination under a unified operations room, as the Houthis were able to break into the right side of the Nehm front through a weak-defended area, where the sixth and seventh military regions believe that it is under the management of the other, and that is why the Houthis were able to surround and control most of that area. In addition, the Houthis headed towards the "Yam Mountains" chain towards Al-Jawf governorate, approaching the historical "Baraqish" area that is under the government's control and located between "Al-Jawf and Marib".
- Military leaders talked about the Houthi penetration of the National Army's communications system and that the Houthis made calls to government forces to withdraw. In one incident, a military commander in the left side of Nehm spoke that a military commander brought reinforcements and more than four military patrols that were full of fighters, but by evening, the commander left with reinforcements and said he was implementing the withdrawal orders.<sup>[12]</sup> This led to a series of withdrawals from Nehm that eventually led to the Houthis' control on some areas. Ten days after the incident, the Yemeni President issued a decision appointing Major General Ahmed Hassan Gibran as Commander of the Seventh Military Region to replace "Major General Mohsen al-Khubei."<sup>[13]</sup> At the beginning, some units of the Yemeni government withstood in the left side of Nehm, but the Houthis pushed more reinforcements, giving their fighters time to have rest during multiple rounds, while the government forces were unable to withstand for a long time under severe pressure. They were exhausted after fighting for several days without any new reinforcements, so they eventually withdrew.<sup>[14]</sup> The Yemeni Ministry of Defense spoke that what had happened was a "tactical withdrawal" and that the military sites would be restored.<sup>[15]</sup>
- The Artillery Weapon: Saudi Arabia's withdrawal of the artillery weapon from locations behind the government forces in the "Nehm front" early strengthened the message that was spoken through the means of communication to the government forces and asked them to withdraw. At the same time, the Houthis intensified the shelling on the government forces, which strengthened the Houthi force and prompted the government forces to withdraw.

A military commander complained about the warplanes in the first days of the attack, and another military commander spoke that the meetings between the Saudi forces and the Ministry of Defense in the city of Marib did not come out with an agreement to send reinforcements and ammunition to the fighting forces in "Nehm". Instead, a Saudi military commander was quoted as saying at the meeting that "it is better to send government forces in the south of the country to fight in Nehm."<sup>[16]</sup>

- Since the arrival of government forces in the Nehm region in 2016, the fighting areas have not changed and this front has continued to expand horizontally as a result of mutual turns to become over a distance of approximately 50 km, but there has been no progress towards the capital, Sanaa, especially with the presence of a huge amount of land mines, planted by the Houthi group. Thus, the arrival of the Houthi group to Al-Jawf and the control of the Al-Hazam directorate will lead the war in Yemen to a new path, making Al-Houthi more superior in any negotiations, imposing more precise determinations about the next stage, unless there is a different governmental / Saudi response. The battle of "Al-Jawf" was under the direct supervision of the Saudi leadership and the leader of the coalition forces, General Prince Fahd bin Turki, not under the leadership of the Yemeni staff.<sup>[17]</sup> This led to a significant conflict of powers between the military units on the ground and the forces that were pushed by Saudi Arabia, as some military units continued to reject orders from the governor of Al-Jawf, Major General Amin al-Okimi. They withdrew from sites, causing the failure of defense plans in the Al-Ghail area. This led to its fall in hands of the Houthis.<sup>[18]</sup>

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## Political goals behind Houthi military progress:

The Houthis' military progress towards the Nehm region, and parts of the Serwah region of Marib and Al-Jawf governorate, has been reported to the government and the coalition, but they did not provide the government forces with necessary reinforcements. The legitimate government devoted itself to its differences with the UAE-backed "Southern Transitional Council".<sup>[19]</sup> The UAE had already withdrawn its defenses from Serwah of Marib in July 2019, after the announcement of its withdrawal from Yemen. The Houthis' progress toward Al-Jawf and Marib governorates strengthens their negotiating position in any new consultations that the United Nations will push for. The Houthis' negotiating position with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also strengthened by targeting the last strongholds of the legitimate government in eastern Yemen and also after the control of the pro-Emirati "Southern Transitional Council" on the legitimate government's areas in the rest of eastern and southern governorates.

By controlling most of Al-Jawf governorate, the Houthis have secured their main stronghold, Saada and Amran, and by controlling large parts of "Nehm", they became able to secure the governorate of Sana'a. The Houthis are also seeking to include Al-Jawf governorate to the Azal Region, which is under their control, before entering the upcoming consultations in order to ensure a change in the outcomes of the National Dialogue.<sup>[20]</sup> What has been achieved on the ground increases the Houthi negotiating position if there is no any new development that enables the legitimate government to strengthen its military presence.

The Houthis may rush to the "city of Marib" to control the oil areas in "Safer", as a Houthi leader pointed to the need to take over gas areas in Marib instead of controlling the city. More than two million people live in the city of Marib, most of whom were displaced from the Houthi-controlled areas.

The legitimate government's loss of its tribal power centers in Al-Jawf and Marib governorates enables Saudi Arabia to put pressure on it to accept a deal that it may conduct with the Houthis in the Muscat consultations.

## The repercussions of military developments on the Yemeni open files

Recent military developments have affected many open files of the country such as the "Stockholm Agreement", "the Riyadh Agreement", "consultations with Saudi Arabia."

### A. Stockholm Agreement

Military developments in the three governorates made the Stockholm Agreement as outdated. The agreement was signed in December 2018. The United Nations and international sponsors provided hope for its implementation on time (December 2018 and January 2019), and a new round of consultations was scheduled to start at the end of January 2019 with no progress made in the Stockholm Agreement (ceasefire and redeployment in Hodeidah, Taiz understandings, the release of prisoners and detainees). The Houthis and the government, with support from the international envoy, decided not to attend a new round of consultations. This continued throughout that period, and no new consultations were held between the two parties until the end of February 2020. Amid the military developments in the three governorates, the UN envoy Martin Griffiths and British Ambassador Michael Aaron said that "Stockholm" has become out of date. "There is a need now for a comprehensive political agreement that stops the war in all fronts, and the Stockholm Agreement was good at its time ... the reality has changed today."<sup>[21]</sup>

From the beginning, it was clear that the Houthis did not want to give up the city of Hodeidah or the ports in favor of security forces, who were not loyal to them, and that the Yemeni government would not even trust the forces that were present at the port in 2014.

What indicates that the implementation of the "Hodeidah Agreement" is far-fetched due to the lack of progress in the implementation process, despite the continuation of the Joint Redeployment Committee's meetings since the beginning of 2019 on a United Nations ship in the Red Sea, because the two conflicting parties do not trust each other to hold meetings in the city of Hodeidah.

In February 2020, the United Nations announced that both sides agreed to a detailed plan to complete the first prisoners exchange, including Saudi and Sudanese soldiers. The new agreement provides for the release of more than 1,400 prisoners and detainees, held by the government and the Houthis, in the first stage, and to be followed by other rounds until the completion of the exchange of all prisoners and detainees from the two parties, who are estimated to more than 16000 prisoners and detainees, according to information presented by both parties after the signing of the Stockholm agreement. The parties continue to meet in Amman – until writing this report (3 March 2020). Although the two parties talk about high hopes that the deal will be implemented, the loss of confidence between the two parties may hinder the completion of the deal.

Regarding "Taiz understandings", there has been no progress to lift the siege imposed by the Houthis on the city since the beginning of 2016. This has caused a humanitarian crisis for more than 600,000 people in the city, struggling for survival, and transporting most foodstuffs through bumpy roads or through a dangerous mountainous roads linking the governorate to the city of Aden, the country's interim capital, and they are usually exposed to shelling by the Houthis.

The failure to implement the agreement has prompted the UN envoy to retreat from his strategy to solve the Yemeni crisis, according to his plan, "step by step through several agreements" to find out a comprehensive agreement between the two parties, but it seems that he will bring together many parties, not only the Houthis and the legitimate government. This is why the Houthis moved to strengthen their position and to be a dominant party in any expected consultations.

## **B. Riyadh Agreement**

After secret Saudi-sponsored consultations, on November 5, 2019, a formal agreement was signed between the legitimate government and the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council in the presence of the Yemeni President, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and the Saudi Crown Prince, to end the state of rebellion that occurred in August 2019, according to which the UAE allies controlled Aden governorate and parts of the neighboring Abyan governorate after battles with the government forces.

The UAE-backed militias failed to control the oil-rich governorate of Shabwa. The agreement consists of four pages (preamble and three political and economic attachments, security and military arrangements). The agreement is based on a specific timetable that begins with the signing of the agreement (the 5th of November 2019) and ends on (5th of February 2020).

The main elements of this agreement are: the transfer of all armed elements and their equipment to their previous locations - i.e. early 2019 - the integration of all military and security personnel in the ministries of interior and defense, and the formation of a new government with a number that does not exceed 24 ministers, including 50% of southerners- more than half of the current government members are from the south of the country.<sup>[22]</sup>

No progress has been made in the agreement, despite direct Saudi supervision. The Southern Transitional Council departed from the Arms Withdrawal Committees in February 2020, and the government team returned to Riyadh after spending several months in the "Palace of Maashek" in Aden to hold meetings and pay salaries to employees without existing on the ground, which is already under the control of the UAE allies.

## Why does the Riyadh agreement collapse?!

- Implementing the agreement requires the UAE's real desire to implement it, as it already controls the "Transitional Council" and its militias that receive their orders from the UAE military leadership. Since the signing of the Riyadh Agreement, Abu Dhabi has made no further assurances to support the agreement. It did not provide any evidence that it pressures the Southern Transitional Council to comply with the agreement's provisions.
- The lack of trust between the legitimate government and the Southern Transitional Council is one of the main reasons for the breakdown of that agreement, which recognizes the "Transitional Council" for the first time as a component on the ground, which enabled the leadership of the council to hold meetings and communication with diplomats working in Yemen.

The recent bombing of the "reception camp" in the city of Marib, which claimed 116 soldiers from the Fourth Brigade of the Presidential Protection Force, made the legitimate government lose trust in the coalition and the "Southern Transitional Council."

There was a question about the reasons of withdrawing the defense system from the government camps. When the ministers of transportation and interior in the legitimate government demanded an independent investigation into the attack, in a sign that did not hide a clear accusation against the coalition and the transitional council of being behind the attack,<sup>[23]</sup> the leaders of the "Southern Transitional Council" expressed their satisfaction with targeting the "camp" which was prepared to be deployed in the "City of Aden", according to the Riyadh Agreement.

- The commitment to its timetable with an excessive optimism, despite the difficulty of implementing it on the ground, is similar to the excessive optimism about previous agreements such as the "Stockholm Agreement" and the "Gulf Initiative 2011". Most of agreements on Yemen had a timetable and were difficult to be implemented at the same time. The "Riyadh Agreement" reveals the extent of Saudi enthusiasm - represented by Prince Khalid bin Salman (Deputy Minister of Defense, in-charge of the Yemeni file), who led the consultations, to make a quick victory. The main dilemma of the Riyadh agreement appears to be related to the interpretation that caused its failure, as happened with the Stockholm agreement between the government and the Houthis regarding the Hodeidah agreement (December 2018). The parties interpret the agreement in a way that serves their own interests, while Saudi Arabia did not provide a public explanation of the agreement.
- The lack of confidence in the Saudi field committees: The two parties do not trust the formed Saudi committees, and the most prominent points include:
  - The agreement stipulates that the government installations must be handed over to the Facilities Protection Force, but the Saudi team has handed over the facilities to the bodies that are affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council" - the government's Facilities Protection Force denied receiving any government installations. (Since the establishment of the transitional council, it has built institutions that are parallel to the state institutions, including local councils and a "parliament" of national assembly, and it has repeatedly threatened to declare a defense ministry.<sup>[24]</sup>

- On several occasions, paramilitary forces, loyal to the Southern Transitional Council, have prevented the Saudi Military Commission from entering its camps in the city of Aden, and it rejected any inspection of weapons caches. In one incident, some recruits threatened members of the Saudi commission with "RPGs", if they try to enter a camp located in "Jabal Hadid". They said that they had received orders to prevent them directly from Aidarous al-Zubaidi, president of the transitional council, whom they call "the leader president".<sup>[25]</sup>
- In January 2020, amendments were made to the military and political aspects of the Riyadh Agreement, and the advisor to the President of the Republic, Dr. Ahmed Obaid bin Dagher, (who was appointed as the head of a governmental committee to revive the understandings of the agreement) said that the agreement on mutual withdrawals and the return of forces to the sites agreed in the Riyadh agreement between the legitimate government and the transitional council places the agreement in an advanced stage on the path to a comprehensive implementation in the military aspect.
- A special committee has assessed intermediate and heavy weapons in the camps of Aden and Abyan in implementation of the provisions of the Riyadh Agreement. According to a government report, the committee, which consists of nine military officers from Saudi Arabia, the government, and the transitional council, has estimated the manpower and weapons in the Badr Camp, the First Brigade, the Infantry Brigade, and the Third Brigade of Presidential Protection Force, in addition to the First Brigade of Presidential Protection Force in the Maashek Palace in Aden and a number of brigades in Abyan governorate.
- After announcing the signing of amendments to the Riyadh Agreement, information said that the committee has headed to "Shakra", "Jaar" and "Zanjibar" in Abyan governorate and to the camps of Aden in January 13-23, 2020, coming out with the following:<sup>[26]</sup>
- Saudi Arabia requested the return of military units that came from Marib, which numbered at 80 officers and soldiers, and this was met with a willingness from the Abyan axis.

- On the following day, January 14, 2020: The legitimacy units moved to Shabwa, and then moved to Marib. On the part of the Southern Transitional Council, a battalion moved to Lahj on the same day.

- The Saudi-led committee changed the location of the forces of Brigadier General Abdullah Al-Subaihi (the prominent military commander who supports President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi) to Haifan in Taiz (center), instead of the boundaries of Al-Bayda governorate (adjacent to Abyan). Military commanders of the government believe that changing the location of the Subaihi Brigade while the transitional council forces, supposed to be withdrawn, remain in Abyan, indicates an intention for future movements in Abyan and perhaps to Shabwa, because the place that was previously determined for the Subaihi Brigade was on border between Al-Bayda and Abyan, and this may be better tactically in case of any military actions by the transitional that violate the agreement, as it will be easy for the Subeihi Brigade to return to Abyan in case any action occurs. But the new location in Haifan represents a hindrance to the brigade's forces and neutralizes it from influencing any possible conflict because the "Labouza and Al-Anad camps" in Lahj are under the control of the Transitional Council forces and they locate between the Subeihi Brigade and Aden brigades. This may prompt the government to reject the transfer of the Subeihi Brigade.<sup>[27]</sup>

• The Southern Transitional Council does not represent southern parties, including those demanding the secession of southern Yemen. After the signing of the agreement, it was rejected by many southern components, including the "Southern National Coalition"<sup>[28]</sup> and the "Southern Salvation Council,"<sup>[29]</sup> in addition to the "Hadramout Conference" and the Mahra and Socotra tribes.

The Houthi military escalation in the governorates of eastern Yemen threatens the "Shabwa governorate", which is adjacent to the Marib governorate, as well as it is their access to the "Hadramout Valley", and makes the arrival of their militants to the "southern governorates" much faster than the other fronts in the Al-Bayda governorate that borders "Marib, Abyan, and Shabwa," or the governorates of Lahj and Al-Dhale, where the Houthi group suffers from inability to reach the southern governorates.

The mutual mistrust between the government forces and the Southern Transitional Council makes it difficult to push out forces in the south of the country, which exceed 100,000 fighters for each party, as each party will fear the other's control of the positions under its control. This fact actually threatens the survival of the "Riyadh Agreement" and creates a new equation. The Saudi-led coalition and its local allies appear in a critical situation that could compel Saudi Arabia to negotiate with the Houthis under Houthi terms and dominance, contrary to what the kingdom wanted to push the Houthis into consultations under military pressure to achieve a Houthi response to Saudi conditions. The "Riyadh Agreement" stipulates that the Southern Transitional Council should have representatives in "any comprehensive peace consultations" with the Houthis, but the collapse of the agreement makes their representation in any UN-led consultations not possible from the point of view of the Yemeni government, which requires a sequential implementation of the agreement.

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**The incident of bombing the «reception camp» in Marib increased the government's mistrust on the coalition. There was always a question about the reasons behind the withdrawing of Saudi defense system from the government military camps in Marib**  
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### **C. Houthi and Saudi negotiations**

After nearly a week of raids that targeted "Aramco" in Abqiq (September 14, 2019), and accusing Iran of being involved in the operation by Saudi Arabia and the United States, the Houthis announced a unilateral initiative to stipulate the group's cessation of drone and ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabia in exchange for Saudi Arabia stopping the war and, what they called, the "siege", in reference to the UN inspection mechanism stipulated in Resolution 2216.

## **The consultations took place indirectly under US and Omani auspices, resulted in the following:**

- Air strikes have slowed or stopped significantly in most areas of the north where the Houthis are present.
- The Houthis have already stopped attacks on Saudi Arabia.
- The Houthis released 290 detainees and prisoners, including Saudis.
- Saudi Arabia reopened Sana'a International Airport to help patients. The ships passage to Hodeidah port was facilitated, after the Houthi regions suffered from a sharp oil derivatives crisis in November 2019.

Saudi negotiations with the Houthis were the most prominent event during years of war, and Saudi Arabia aims to reach a "permanent calm" on borders and some areas, while the Houthis see the need to reach a "comprehensive solution" that stops Saudi interference to support the legitimate government and recognizes the Houthis as a stronger party. Sources said that the Saudis want a ceasefire in four areas, including the capital, Sana'a. As a result of the divergence of targets between the two parties, the consultations between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia in the Sultanate of Oman ceased in December 2019. The Houthis resumed launching ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia. The Houthi attacks on Saudi borders increased. Saudi Arabia announced the death of 11 soldiers in the first two weeks of that month.<sup>[30]</sup> The negotiations resumed again in January 2020, but they seemed to have stalled, as the Houthis targeted Saudi Arabia more violently and the missiles again reached Saudi oil facilities in Yanbu.<sup>[31]</sup>

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**Saudi negotiations with the Houthis were the most prominent event during the past years of war to reach a truce. The Houthis see that such consultations are necessity to be recognized as the biggest force**  
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The Houthis rushed towards "Nehm", "al-Jawf," and "Marib". Following the suspension of the consultations, the Houthis are trying to push the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to negotiate on behalf of the Yemeni government and its future, something the Saudis continued to reject during these weeks of consultations.

The international community, including Britain, hold the Yemen pen in the Security Council, are rushing to revitalize that channel in light of the coming of a new Sultan to the Sultanate of Oman. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Rap visited Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, in early March 2020, to meet Yemeni, Omani and Saudi officials in an attempt to reactivate the consultations in light of the Houthis' threat to the last government strongholds in the east of the country.

Saudi officials believe that the important thing now is to "protect Saudi borders and lands and to improve its economy" in what appears to be a trend towards domestic priorities. The Saudi government is pushing towards a response to the political and economic conditions that the kingdom is going through due to low oil prices and a state of economic stagnation that is already affected by the Houthi attacks. Regarding its position towards the Yemeni government, the Saudis believe that there is a need to achieve stability in Yemen "through a Yemeni government that manages its institutions and protects its borders and lands." It is a shift in previous Saudi responses by defining the legitimate government as the main condition for its support. Saudi Arabia does not want that the Yemeni territories be used by Iran or other countries directly or indirectly to threaten its security or the security of the global trade corridor through the Red Sea<sup>[32]</sup> But even if the Houthis promised to stop cooperation with Iran, it is difficult for Saudi Arabia to find a new measuring instrument that would enable it to measure the extent of the Houthis' departure from the Iranian regime, which the Houthis consider one of its tools.

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**Riyadh is heading to internal economic and security priorities. It sees that it is necessary to protect its borders in cooperation with a strong Yemeni government, which is a retreat from the condition of restoring the legitimacy in Yemen for which it led the Arab coalition**  
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## Margins:

[1] The southern transitional council was established in 2017, and the UAE increased its support to the council and recruited armed militants to support the council. The UAE purpose, to far extent, is to control the ports along the southern coastline of Yemen that are necessary for the UAE strategy to control the sea corridors in the Arabian Peninsula.

[2] Abaad researchers obtained information by tracking official investigations and sources from within the Yemeni Army

[3] Military leaders say that the front was suffering from the migration of soldiers, and that each brigade no longer had only an actual battalion, and that these brigades are not all present and there are about 15 thousand soldiers who were drawn by the coalition from the front to the border brigades

[4] Two military leaders affiliated with the legal government, familiar with the battle details, spoke to the Abaad Center researcher on February 20, 2020

[5] The group bases its ideology on what has come to be known as “political Hashemite” and it is the families that claim to be descendants of the companion Ali bin Abi Talib who married “Fatima” the daughter of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad and believe that they have the right to power and leadership of the country. The Houthis belong to these families, and live in Al-Ghail villages have some branches of this family that were already divided between the Houthis and the legitimate government, as happened in most families. The Directorate of "Al-Ghail" is an ancient intellectual bastion of thought.

[6] Two military officials spoke to "France" and "Associated Press" <http://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/36356>

[7] The Monitoring Unit at the Abaad Center obtained a document from the Saudi Ministry of Defense that includes a message addressed to the commander of the Saudi force commander in Ma'rib Ali Al-Anzi No. (4632) indicating the telegram of the commander of the joint special operations cell based on the telegram of the commander of the ground forces regarding any operational directions in the theater of operations From the commander of joint operations, which the cable considers directives from President Hadi beginning on Sunday May 13, 2018.

[8] In July 2019, President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi issued a decision appointing Major General Saghir Hammoud Aziz as commander of joint operations of the forces, especially with no position in the army's structure holding this capacity. Military leaders say that Saudi Arabia is currently trying to support Ibn Aziz and instructed him more broadly and by directing its support towards him and instructing him to start communicating with the tribes to obtain fighters through whom he is recruited to form one or more brigades that will be under the command of joint operations that the Saudis consider that any joint operations were unable to Imposing its authority over the various regions and brigades of the army.

[9] A source said to the dimensions that the estimated amount of armament is \$ ten million, to be handed over to an army officer assigned from the Presidential Protection Command, while Yemeni officers say there is no money for armament and that there are some medium weapons that were entered into the warehouses and many of them were targeted dramatically.

[10] Leaders in the coalition justify the lack of support for the Yemeni army with specific weapons to fears that what happened during the liberation of the southern provinces may be repeated, as press investigations revealed the leak of American weapons that US supplied to the UAE and Saudi armies to armed terrorist groups.

<https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/02/middleeast/yemen-lost-us-arms/>

[11] The last salary that soldiers in Nehm received was the payment for September 2018, it was paid in early 2019.

[12] Military leaders spoke to the Abaad on condition of anonymity. The military commander said that a field commander in the area objected to the reinforcements withdrawal with his weapon on the highway, but he was surprised that the "military commander" who came with the reinforcements was in the first vehicle to leave and told him that there were orders to withdraw." Abaad was unable to reach that commander after his dismissal.

[13] Appointment took place on January 28, 2020. The reasons of the dismissal were not mentioned in the decision.

[14] Two soldiers, who were the last departures from the area, said that the fighting continued in Nehm until their withdrawal in early February 2020 and that the Houthis continued to send reinforcements while the government forces withdrew. They said that communications were lost and that they were able to remain undercover for several days until they were able to return to the city of Marib.

[15] The Minister of Defense chaired a meeting of military leaders in Marib and spoke of a "tactical withdrawal" of some units in the Nehm front.

[16] Military leaders spoke on condition of anonymity.

[17] This was revealed by former head of Moral Guidance, Mohsen Khursouf, in an interview with Bilqis TV Program "This Evening" on Sunday (March 1, 2020).

[18] A telegram on February 26, 2020 said that Al-Jawf governor Amin al-Okimi complains that military forces, led by commander of the Special Forces Brigade, Mohamed al-Hajuri, do not to implement defense and attack plans. Days later, the Houthis managed to control the "al-Ghail" in Al-Jawf", but al-Hajuri denied in a statement from the brigade, claiming that his forces were expelled and that caches looted. Military information says that the withdrawal of al-Hajuri's forces and forces affiliated with the Saudi-backed border brigades, led by Radad al-Hashemi, enabled the Houthis to make a rapid detour, according to a prominent military commander who told " researcher of the Abaad Center for Studies and Research."

[19] The Abaad Center for Studies and Research researchers were informed by military leaders, who are familiar with these reports, that the staff and the leadership of the Ministry of Defense and the Arab Coalition were aware of the Houthis movements and their detour plan. The Yemeni Minister of Defense was in Egypt to attend a government event, after talking about a government change according to "Riyadh Agreement" between the government and the southern transitional council, sponsored by Saudi Arabia.

[20]The outputs of the National Dialogue indicate that Al-Jawf is part of the Sheba Region (Al-Jawf, Marib, and Al-Bayda), while the Sa'ada stronghold of Houthis comes in the Azal Region (Saada, Sana'a, Amran, and Dhamar) which is a region without economic resources or and a sea port, which is what the Houthis are trying to obtain. And this was one of the reasons why the Houthi group announced to topple the government in September 2014. The Yemeni dialogue conference ended in early 2014 after it lasted 9 months.

[21]Britain alludes to the end of the "Stockholm Agreement" <http://www.yemenmonitor.com/Details/ArtMID/908/ArticleID/36181>

[22] For reading the terms of the agreement and an analysis of the agreement, read a report by the Abaad, entitled: The government and separatists agreement ... the path to peace in Yemen on the rubble of sovereignty <https://abaadstudies.org/news-59822.html>

[23]Yemeni Interior Minister calls on the coalition to clarify the bombing of Marib- Al-Jazeera Net <https://cutt.us/kkJe4>

[24] The Coast Guard refuses entry of any other force to protect the ports in Aden and confirms its readiness to do the mission - online source <https://cutt.us/0Qypa>

[25] A Yemeni soldier, who was accompanying the Saudi committee in January 2020, spoke to a researcher at the Abaad Center for Studies and Research on February 15, 2020.

[26]A secret report by a government team, which was shared with "Abaad Center for Studies and Research."

[27]Two government military leaders were contacted by a researcher at the Abaad Center for Studies and Research to find out what such a change would do on the evening of February 26, 2020.

[28] It was established in April 2019 and included dozens of major southern figures. It was supported by the Yemeni government, it believed that the federal Yemen of six regions is the most appropriate solution.

[29] It was established in 2019 and included a group of southern coalitions and personalities, some of which are calling for secession and others call for "federal Yemen". This entity was established to reject the growing Saudi and Emirati presence in the southern governorates.

[30]Special monitoring by the Monitoring Unit of "Abaad Center for Studies and Research" according to the official Saudi announcements

[31] Yemen's war is escalating again <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/26/yemens-war-is-escalating-again/>

[32]A prominent Saudi official related to the Yemeni file answered several questions raised by the Abaad Center for Studies and Research in mid-February 2020 before the Houthis took control of the city of Al-Hazm in Al-Jawf.



مركز أبعاد للدراسات والبحوث

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